Challenging Behavior: Prevention Strategies for Children with Disabilities
Disabilities Dialogue

Dawn Williams: Over the course of the next few months, we're going to be doing several different topics. This month and next month, we're doing a series on challenging behaviors. For today, we're going to be talking about prevention strategies for challenging behaviors, and next month we'll be looking more at the intervention plans that you could use for children with challenging behaviors. Then we'll be looking more closely at effective instruction, focusing more on assessments and embedding learning goals into instruction. We'll also cover dual-language learners who have disabilities and also collaborating with partners.

Tamarack O'Donnell: Thank you, Dawn. Now that we know what's in store, hopefully all of those topics are going to be relevant to you in your work. Just so you know what to expect on our webinars, there's going to be three main segments for each of the Disabilities Dialogue webinars, starting with an interview segment where we'll have a guest speaker on that's an expert on the topic that we're addressing, and then that will be followed by a Q&A segment, and then at the end we'll go over our resources that are applicable to the topic so that you can find things after we sign off on the webinar that would be relevant to you.

So it's my pleasure today to introduce our guest speaker, Mary Louise. She's going to be talking to us today about issues around addressing challenging behavior with young children who have disabilities. She was the director of the Center on Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, also known as CSEFEL, and she's currently one of the directors at the lab school at Vanderbilt
University, which is an inclusive early childhood program. She's a well known expert on challenging behaviors, and we're very lucky to have her here with us today. Mary Louise, thank you so much for joining us today.

Dawn: Hi, Mary Louise. I'd like to invite you to turn on your webcam so we can see you. Okay, so while Mary Louise is getting her webcam on, you know, today we were talking about – real closely on prevention strategies that you can do in the preschool classroom and in the early childhood environment, and, you know, challenging behaviors can be kind of tough sometimes. I think there's a lot of hot buttons that can be pushed for teachers sometimes when they're experiencing those challenging behaviors. I know I've certainly got that in the classroom.

Tamarack: Yeah, it's definitely a hot topic right now, considering that there's the behavior that you're trying to understand, but then there's the emotions that you're having reacting to it, and that's where it can be really helpful to have a better understanding of prevention strategies and ways that you can sort of avoid some of those larger conflicts altogether.

Dawn: Absolutely. So when we're focusing on prevention, Mary Louise is going to be sharing some prevention strategies with us over the course of today, and she's also going to be joining us next month when we're talking more closely about intervention. All right, hi, everybody. So, well, before we get into the presentation today, we have a poll to get you started that will help us focus a little bit more on what we want to cover today. So we'd like to know, what are the times of day where you see

the most challenging behaviors? Please go ahead and take a moment and complete this poll, and we'll be right back with you in just a minute.

All right, thanks, everybody for completing that. Hopefully you were able to see those results, too. It looks about like 67 percent have some trouble with transitions, and we're certainly going to talk about that and different prevention strategies you can use during that. And also how it might be – different strategies you could use that would be specific to children with disabilities.

Tamarack: And it looks like circle time was a close – well, the second most difficult area that teachers have with challenging behavior, and that's definitely not surprising. Transitions and circle time are both challenging times where, as a large group activity, teachers are trying to manage lots of children at one time. And then transitions are often overlooked when you're making plans for your daily schedule, and yet it's an opportunity for a lot of creative strategies to be used - and learning opportunities. -

Dawn: Yeah, it's very true. So one of the first things we wanted to kind of get out of the way right at the jump was a myth or kind of this notion we often hear about, that children with challenging behaviors most likely also have disabilities. And that's not necessarily the case, right?

Tamarack: It's not. Sometimes it's easy to try and make that leap, or to box children with disabilities into the same package with challenging behavior, but it's not really an assumption that's fair to make. A lot of times challenging behaviors are related to many other things, and that's why we're talking about preventative strategies today, but not necessarily that they have unique challenges in learning and engaging, they just need a little bit of support.

Dawn: Right, right. And so the center that we mentioned, the Center for Social Emotional Foundations in Early Learning, is something that hopefully a lot of folks are familiar with, but this is kind of – it's an approach to promoting social emotional competence and addressing challenging behavior, and it really starts at the foundation. So there are supports that are universal for all children, and that's kind of the bottom of the pyramid there. And as you move up the pyramid, there are different levels of support that teachers can provide, depending on the level of need. But those supports that are universal to all children are like nurturing and responsive relationships and high-quality supportive environments. And this CSEFEL pyramid's really similar to the NCQTL foundation of the house, if some of you all are familiar with that. We're going to share some resources with you later that are about all those preventative strategies that are really critical to supporting a nurturing environment, like schedules and routines and supporting transitions.

Tamarack: Yeah, and these are strategies that are going to be supportive to all children, and so that's why we call them the foundation, really. And so then after you're creating strategies for all children, you can move up the pyramid. And those are the kids that need more – a little more targeted support, perhaps some environmental supports and curriculum modifications. And then as you move further up the pyramid, those are the children who need more intensive intervention. And this is what we'll be addressing next month, is creating some behavior support plans for those children. So we kind of wanted to pull this model up so you could see why it is that we're addressing prevention before we go into the more intensive support plans today.

Dawn: Right. All right. So we also – so a lot of times – I know I did when I was a teacher in dealing with challenging behaviors, you know you do all the things that you can to set up your environment, and sometimes it just feels like some of those things aren't working, and you just want to understand, why am I still seeing this challenging behavior? I'm sure other teachers have been frustrated with that, too, when you just, you can kind of get at your wit's end. You just don't understand why you're still having that challenging behavior. So one of the things we wanted to discuss today is what is the meaning behind that behavior. Like, what are children trying to do with that?

Tamarack: Right. So there's the form and the function of behavior, and the form is really the behavior itself and what's happening. But when you think about the function of the behavior, there's typically some kind of meaning behind that behavior. Although it may feel sometimes like it's simply to get a certain reaction from you, it's not always the case. It's often that they're trying to communicate something to us, and it's just a matter of getting to the bottom of the meaning behind that behavior.

Dawn: And figuring out what that trigger might be, and what's happening before, what's in that environment that might be causing that, maybe what happened before they got to school or maybe outside on the playground. But there usually is something that is trying to be communicated, which, in the moment, is not always easy to think about, but you – there usually is some type of message that's being communicated and some need that they have. So one other thing we wanted to try to focus on today is thinking about, so, okay, now that you may understand some of the meaning behind children's behavior, what might be some prevention strategies? And we talked a little bit about the foundation of the house and the foundation of that CSEFEL pyramid, about setting up a nurturing and responsive environment, and there are a few strategies you can use to do that in different areas of a classroom. So one might be how you are setting up your classroom environment, organizing your environment so it is set up to alleviate some challenging behaviors.

Tamarack: So Mary Anne said she's on audio. Do we want to turn her on so she can talk with us?

Dawn: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Tamarack: I think she's ready to share some prevention strategies with us.

Dawn: Excellent. Okay, Mary Louise, can you say hi to us?

Mary Louise Hemmeter: Can you hear me?

Dawn: Yeah, we sure can.

Mary Louise: Okay. Sorry.

Dawn: Oh, no, we're glad to hear you.

Mary Louise: I haven't really heard anything, because I've been running around, trying to get a computer. So I don't know where we are.

Dawn: Well, that's okay. We were just actually just talking about some prevention strategies that you can use to kind of create a nurturing environment in the classroom.

Mary Louise: Okay, so –

Tamarack: Maybe we can just step back for a minute so you can set the stage for us, Mary Louise. We were just talking about that big question of the moment when teachers are just feeling overwhelmed by a certain behavior and they're thinking, "Why is this happening? What is going on? I just don't understand." Can you help us figure out, like, how do we answer this question for teachers around why do children act out in challenging ways?

Mary Louise: Sure thing. So when I work with teachers, I often hear people say things like, "He just seems to do it for no reason at all." "I can't figure out why she's engaging in problem behavior." And the truth is that almost all challenging behavior has some meaning, and our task is really to figure out what that meaning is. So it could be something like, "I want to play with him, and he won't play with me," or, "I want the toy he has," or, "I don't want to do that," or, "I'm bored," or, "I'm sad," or, "I'm scared." And what we have to do is really look at what's happening around the behavior to figure out which of those messages it is. So if we figure out that the child's bored, that tells us one thing about what we might do. But if what we think is that the child's scared, that would tell us a different thing. Or if the child needs a break, it would tell us – we would respond in a different way. And so we really have to do observations that allow us to really understand what the meaning is that the child's trying to communicate.

Dawn: And so that makes me think of a follow-up question. So how – do you have some recommendations on how to set up those types of observations? You know, there's – people have different supports in classrooms. How can disabilities coordinators help teachers do that?

Mary Louise: Yeah, that's a really good question, because I think often we ask teachers to reflect on that and to help us understand, but the truth is that when you're in the classroom with a bunch of little bodies, 16 or 18 children running around, it's sometimes hard to really be able to watch the child that you're most concerned about with enough intensity to really figure that out. And so we think a really important role of somebody is to be able to go and sit in the classroom and really keep their eyes on that child so that they can in fact see what leads up to the behavior. Because a lot of times with problem behavior, we don't see anything until the problem behavior happens, and so what we need to know is what happened preceding the problem behavior. And so that's something that someone who's not in the classroom on a regular basis could come in the classroom and do in order to support the teacher to figure that out.

Tamarack: And then are there – are there some common things that you might see when you're digging down deeper and finding what the meaning is behind a behavior?

Mary Louise: Yeah, so, I mean, let me give you an example of one that maybe is a little less obvious. So I was working with a teacher one time, and she said that the child just kept getting up and leaving circle time for no reason at all. And when I observed during circle time, what I saw was that this – was that this was a pretty low-functioning child, and they were doing an activity that was about generating

questions they were going to ask when they went on a field trip, and so I could see the child just getting bored, not because she was bored, but because she didn't know what was going on. So that's a little less obvious than you might see – a more common one around a more aggressive behavior or a temper tantrum kind of thing is you might see a child go over and try to play with some kids and they don't let that child, and so then that child walks away or that child kind of, you know, inserts himself into the play situation by taking a toy. But what you need to know, what the teacher needs to know is that in fact what happened before that was that the child actually tried to enter the play situation in a really appropriate way, and the peers didn't respond to it that way. So then the child used the problem behavior to get themselves into the play situation.

Tamarack: Okay, thank you for those examples. That's helpful.

Dawn: Yeah, absolutely. And so one thing we wanted to ask you about as well is that, you know, that thing we often hear, that children with challenging behaviors just, of course, have a disability. That assumption is made, like their behavior is so challenging that it must be a disability and not just a challenging behavior. Could you talk to us a little bit about that?

Mary Louise: Sure thing. So I hear that a lot, too. I hear it both ways, that children who have challenging behaviors have disabilities, and children who have disabilities have challenging behaviors. And in fact those things aren't always true. So in a lot of our pre-K settings, preschool kinds of settings, children with some of the most problematic behaviors are not children who qualify for any kind of special ed services. They don't have a diagnosed disability. A lot of times problem behavior is about a young child being in a group setting for the first time after being at home with a parent for the first three years of their life. And so it doesn't in any way indicate the child has a disability, it just means that the child needs some help learning how to be in a social setting. It's also the case that many kids with disabilities don't have problem behavior, and so I think one of the things we want to be real quick to say is that disability does not equal challenging behavior or the other way around.

Tamarack: Yes. Yeah, thank you for that. I think it's a really important point to clarify, that sort of question.

Mary Louise: Yeah, but can I just – I'm sorry, can I just add there that when a child has a disability, it might affect how we deal with the challenging behavior. So it's important to know that the child has a disability and what the disability is, whether it's language, cognitive, motor, or whatever it is that might be impacting the strategies we choose to deal with the challenging behavior.

Dawn: Right, which is something we definitely want to try and get at today, differentiating what supports might be different for children with disabilities. So thinking about some prevention strategies. You know, when you're trying to address challenging behaviors in your classroom, what are some of the best ways to try and go about doing that?

Mary Louise: Yeah, so you all probably talked a little bit about the pyramid when I was not on, but I think –

Dawn: Sure, but we can go back to it, though.

Mary Louise: Yeah, I just want to start out by saying that, you know, our research as well as research other people have done would suggest that the vast number of challenging – or the vast majority of challenging behaviors in young children can be addressed through prevention and promotion. And so I'm going to talk about some prevention strategies right now, but I want you to know two things. One is that we're going to get to intervention. So we're going to get to the top of the pyramid and what are the strategies you use for the children whose behavior isn't responsive to promotion and prevention. But we think it's important to start with promotion and prevention. And the other thing about that is that when we think about promotion and prevention, we have to think about individualized approaches to promotion and prevention. So it's not that you just do individualized things at the top of the pyramid. So, for example, one of – a prevention strategy that we think a lot about is schedules and routines and transitions in the classroom. And so lots of times children who have challenging behaviors don't follow the routines of the classroom, and so a general prevention strategy would be, do we have a routine, a schedule that's clearly articulated, that the children are taught, is implemented consistently, children know what to do when and what's expected of them. Those are prevention strategies for all children. But we would say a prevention strategy, say, for a child who has some kind of cognitive disability or delay, a prevention strategy might be the use of a visual schedule that doesn't have words on it; it just has pictures. And so the child can follow the schedule of the day by looking at a photograph that represents the activity or an object that represents the activity. And so it's still a prevention strategy, but it's a prevention strategy that's individualized for a child with a disability.

Tamarack: Now, Mary Louise, is this a strategy that could be used in a child care setting or at home? And if so, do you have an example of what that might look like?

Mary Louise: Oh, yeah, that's a good question. So, yeah, I mean, it's a strategy that can be used anywhere. And let me just say that for children with challenging behaviors, one of the most important things for them is a consistent and predictable routine, and so that's whether it's at home or school or child care or Head Start. But let me think about it. So here's an example. So I knew someone whose young child had challenging behavior and was going to child care for the first time and was having a hard time during the day because he kept wanting to know when mom was coming or dad was coming, and he would have these little tantrums around it. And so we developed a visual schedule for him that showed a picture for each of the activities during the day, and at the end of the day, there was a photograph of his mom and dad. And so as they took off each activity throughout the day, he could see that the time when mom and dad were coming would be sooner. Now, typical kids can learn that pretty easily. Children who have any kind of delay or disability may need that concrete representation of, "First we do this, then we do this, then we do this, and then mom's coming." That would be one example, and you could do that at child care. And the example in the home might be a lot of times families talk about, with children with challenging behavior, having a hard time at bedtime with children going to bed. And so we often design visual schedules for those children that's really a visual of what the bedtime routine is. So it might be a picture of a bathtub, it might then be a picture of pajamas, it might then be toothbrushing, parent reading a story, and then go to bed. And so it's not just that you use that visual schedule, but you help the parent point to each step of the schedule as they're walking the child through that routine.

Dawn: Got it, got it. Okay, so then another one we often hear about is transitions. So we did a poll earlier, and we asked folks when was the time of day that you experience the most challenging behaviors, and transitions was it by about 67 percent, so...

Mary Louise: I could've predicted that.

Dawn: Prevention strategies for that?

Mary Louise: Yeah, so – so I'm going to back up and just say general prevention strategies for all children. One is decrease the number of transitions that children have to experience in a day. One of the things that might be interesting for you to do with a teacher or a family or a child care provider is sit down and count how many transitions there are in a day. And I think we're always kind of surprised by how often children are transitioning. So I think if there's ways to decrease some of those, that would be a good idea. Another prevention strategy is to decrease the number of times that all children have to do the same thing at the same time, because that requires children to line up and wait for children who aren't getting to the line on time or whatever. So decreasing those. And so here's an example. So we worked with a little girl – some of you might've seen a video of her on the CSEFEL website – who had a difficult time with transitions. And so – and had some delays. And so they had a really predictable classroom schedule, and when it came time to transition, the teacher actually transitioned her first. So she showed her a visual of where she was going, she told her to put the blocks in the box, and that she could bring a block with her to the next activity. The child did it, the teacher went to the next activity, got her started in something, gave her some positive feedback, and then transitioned all of the children. Now, sometimes people say, "Well, but why didn't she have to clean up?" Or, "Doesn't that take a lot of the teacher's time?" And what we would say is, for children with disability, and particularly who have delays and they need that more intensive level of support, if you just keep hoping that they're going to do it the same way as every other child in the classroom without giving them that more intensive support, you're going to spend a lot of time correcting the child's behavior when you could actually prevent it by helping them transition first.

Tamarack: So it sounds like what you're talking about is a certain level of scaffolding. Not necessarily expecting the end result right from the get-go, but building on smaller, more incremental skills.

Mary Louise: Absolutely. So in the example that I was just giving, you know, the teacher might start out by saying to the child, "You have to put that one block in a box, and then you can come with me to the next activity." And once the child's doing that and has learned the routine and the expectations and has been successful, then you could say, "I want you to put all the blocks in the box." And then gradually move the child to where they're able to do the routine or the transition like the other children. But expecting them to go from never doing it to doing it just like the other children overnight is kind of like expecting children to go from not knowing how to write their name to writing their name overnight. It's a developmental thing.

Dawn: Yeah, I think that's such a good point. I think we have different expectations when it comes to behavior. That you have those same steps and think of it as a developmental trajectory and those baby steps. I mean, maybe that's something that needs to be on a plan, you know, like on someone's individual learning plan.

Mary Louise: Yeah, I mean, I think hopefully if kids have – you know, we consider some of those things kind of social emotional skills, and hopefully if children are having trouble with those kind of things, they do appear on children's IEPs. But I think a big message we need to help teachers and caregivers think about is that when children aren't doing – if they aren't engaging in appropriate behaviors, it's often because they don't know how to. And if we assume that our job is to teach them how to engage in appropriate social behaviors, then we have to think about it just like we think about teaching anything else.

Dawn: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Absolutely. I honestly think that there's – you know, I also think teachers don't know the amount of time it might take to learn a behavioral skill. Right? And it's going to be different for different children.

Tamarack: Especially for children with disabilities who need slightly more support.

Mary Louise: Right, and I mean, I think sometimes we – when children engage in problem behavior over time, what we have to realize is that they've learned that that behavior works for them. And not learned like – they don't cognitively say, "If I do this, this will happen," but in fact that inappropriate behavior has often been reinforced, and so it takes time to teach them that another behavior, a more appropriate behavior will work as well.

Tamarack: Right. They have to unlearn a behavior that has been pretty functional for them for a while and then start a replacement, yeah.

Dawn: I mean, think how long it takes a new – an adult to learn a new – to trade a new habit or a new routine.

Mary Louise: Right. That's a really good point, Dawn, yeah.

Tamarack: So, Mary Louise, when we did the poll, the next, the runner up was circle time. So can you talk to us a little bit about supporting kids during large group, teacher-directed activities?

Mary Louise: Sure. So – so this is one that's not unlike what I said about transitions, which is I think oftentimes a general prevention strategy is to decrease the amount of time children sit in a large group activity. Because I think when you put 16 children in a group and expect them to do the same thing at the same time, you know you have – that developmentally in a group of 16 or 18 children, you probably have a 2- or 3-year age difference cognitively. And if you have children with severe disabilities, even more than that. And expecting them to somehow sit and get something out of an activity with everybody can be hard. So one thing we do is we just say, what do you really need to accomplish in large group? And keep it short and do those things which you're most likely to be able to do. So assuming you're doing that, what are some ways that you can prevent problem behaviors?

So some of the things you see up here on the screen are – the thing that says "thumbs up sitting" is just a way to teach children what the expectations of circle time are. And I think often we do circle and tell children not to lay down or not to touch their friends or not to do this, but have we ever really been intentional about teaching them what to do? And so having expectations and being explicit about

teaching them is important. And remember now we're talking about children with disabilities. We have to think about more intentional, more intensive, more individualized ways of teaching those expectations so children learn them. Another thing we sometimes do, and this is what the other visual is here on your slide. Well, first of all, obviously there's prevention things like having engaging activities and that children have an active role in that, could be in all of those things, but this other thing we sometimes do is called "think, pair, share," where when the teacher asks – say the teacher's reading a book and says, "What do you think Lily's going to do next?" And they sit and they let different children talk. Well, then that means all the other children are sitting and waiting. And so sometimes we do a procedure that we call "think, pair, share" where we have children pair off in either dyads or triads and talk together about the answer to that question. And for children with disabilities, a teacher could facilitate that process and could in fact be working on both social and communication skills within the context of the large group activity while the more competent children are doing their own little oneon-one – I mean, their own little interactions with their peer or their dyad or triad that they're working with. So those are some examples of how we could maybe prevent some problem behavior during circle.

Tamarack: I like that last example you gave, because it kind of nails head on one of the biggest struggles, I think, for children in large group activities, which is wait time. And so you already addressed – you know, you talked about maybe shortening the time that you're expecting them to sit, making those expectations really clear for them so they know what they should be doing, but then this "think, pair, share" is such a neat way to occupy some time when you're expecting a lot of wait time from these young kids.
Mary Louise: Yeah, and if you – I mean, we've seen teachers do this really well, and it doesn't take long to teach most of the children in an inclusive early childhood program to be able to do that without teacher support. But it takes a little bit of time, but once children are pretty good at doing that, then the teacher, as I said, can use that time to work, to provide more intensive support to the child who isn't learning how to do that quite as independently.

Dawn: Yeah, and I heard you mention intensive supports a couple times. It makes me think, okay, so we figure out that a child needs more intensive supports. That seems to be that they're – to me, that there needs to be some intentional planning around that. Like, so, yes, we know they need some more supports, so how are we going to make that happen?

Mary Louise: Yeah, actually I thought you were going to say something else, Dawn, so I'm going to address two things with this. So one is that, yes, that a lot of times what people do is they try to do things, do things, do things and hope everybody learns them. And then when children don't, then they have to deal with it. Versus saying up front, "I've got this child who has a speech and language delay, who has problem behaviors. How am I going to teach that child how to do 'think, pair, share'?" So it's thinking about it ahead of time instead of having – going through the process of, "Oh, I've done it this way for two weeks, and she still isn't getting it," rather than being proactive and doing that up front. But the other thing I thought you were going to say, Dawn, is that it sounded like, as I talked about intensive and individualized, that I was going to more of an individualized behavior support plan, like we're going to talk about next week. And I want to make a really clear distinction here, which is that a lot of the bottom of the pyramid, so the prevention and promotion thing, if we individualize those, we're not going to get to the place where we have to develop that individual behavior support plan. So an individual behavior support plan, which we're going to talk about next week – or next month – is

much more intensive than doing, Dawn, what you just suggested, which is planning up front about how to do whatever it is we're going to do more intentional – being more intentional about it and being more planful and being more intensive about it when children need that just as basic prevention strategies.

Tamarack: Yeah, So for a small amount of effort, you're getting a lot of bang for your buck if you focus more on the front end versus having to be responsive.

Mary Louise: Yeah, and a lot of teachers, after we've worked with them on things like this will say, "Even though it took a little bit more time, it didn't take as much time as I was spending dealing with that child when they didn't engage in appropriate behavior." It's just a shift. Let's put our effort up front rather than when the child's then being reactive.

Dawn: Right, right, right. Okay, and so then we also wanted to ask you about peer support. We've heard some really useful prevention strategies. We talked about visual supports and changes to environments and some ways adults can be supportive, but are there some ways that peers can be of support to children with challenging behaviors?

Mary Louise: Absolutely. And so much of problem behavior is about learning how to be with other children. And so using peers as supports is a really great way to address problem behavior or prevent problem behavior. So just – I was thinking about this. What are just some basic things you can think about with peers? Well, one is that you can think about using peers as a model. So saying something like, "Oh, today when Dawn wanted to play with Tam, she took her favorite toy over there and offered to play." So using that as an example for the child, that's one way. Or pointing it out when it's actually happening is another. Another thing to do – well, I think "think, pair, share" is another example of using peers. Another one is that you can do a kind of peer buddy thing where – so if a child with problem behavior who has some kind of cognitive delay is having a hard time with a transition and we have a really highly skilled, confident peer, we could pair them together to do the transition together. Not necessarily for the more confident peer to, you know, push the less confident peer through the process, but just to be their friend in the process. And that, too, will need some help up front. There's another strategy that some people use called "stay, play, and talk." And it's a really easy way to teach peers to help engage their friends in play. And so – so a lot of behavior problems about children with problem behavior and disability is having a hard time entering into play, and so one of the ways we can do that is to teach peers to "stay, play, and talk." And that just means you go near your friend, you play with them, and you talk to them. And it's pretty amazing how even 3- and 4-year-olds are willing to do those kinds of things to help their peers.

Dawn: Yeah, absolutely.

Tamarack: Yeah, I'm looking at some of the pictures you have up on the slide, and I see a buddy maybe helping his peer line up from outside where they're holding hands. That would be some pairing up with a buddy. I see a picture here with a teacher involved. Can you tell us how much teacher involvement you think is necessary when it comes to peer support?

Mary Louise: Yeah, I mean, that's a really important point, Tam, and I'm glad you brought that up, because I think that it is important to realize that peer support doesn't mean "not teacher support." It just means – first of all, it's a more natural thing for children to get help from their peers, but also it requires the teacher teaching the peer what to do and giving the peer some positive feedback for doing it, because it does take them – if we're having them do "stay, play, talk," it's keeping them from maybe going and playing with who they want to play with. And so it's both about teaching them what their role is and then also giving them some positive feedback for doing it. We also think it's really important with young children that they have a choice about it, and so unless we were – unless you just did an activity where you said "Everybody's going to be with a friend to clean up."

Tamarack: [inaudible]

Mary Louise: Yeah, and you assign everybody, that's one thing. But if you want someone to help a particular child, say, during outdoor play, it would be really important to find – and peers will do it if you say, "I really need someone today to help Luke..." you know, whatever. Kids get pretty excited about doing that. But we also see peers get tired of doing it, and so it's a good thing to kind of rotate the peers we have.

Tamarack: So it's important for the teacher to stay tuned in to how the peer who's being supportive is feeling about the interaction.

Mary Louise: Absolutely that, yes.

Dawn: Okay, so we want to get to some of the questions, because they have been coming in. And you've been sharing along the way how some of these things are different for children with disabilities. Is there anything else you could add with that?
Mary Louise: Yeah, so I do want to add that – I don't know how to say this, but sometimes when we're doing prevention strategies with children who don't have disabilities, we're just trying to prevent the problem behavior from happening until children learn to do things in the way that we want them to do it. Sometimes with children with disabilities, we're not going to get to a point where those kids are never going to need help. We're just hoping to try to get them to a place where they'll be more independent. So, for example, we worked – or I know a mom who has a kid with autism, and she did – she did, you know, individualized behavior support with her son when he was little, and now she says, "You know, he does pretty well, but he's always going to need visual schedules. He's always going to need a social story or some way of him learning what to expect from a new routine." And so I think the one thing about kids with disabilities is just knowing that some of them may always need – or may need these supports for a longer period of time than others.

Tamarack: And would the strategies themselves vary?

Mary Louise: Yeah, the strategies could vary, too. So, you know, maybe as an example, for a typical child who didn't have any delays, we might be able to write a social story about classroom expectation and give them a little practice, and they might do pretty well. But for a child with a disability, we might have to read the story, do some role playing, prompt them when they're actually in the play setting, give them some feedback, come back to it day after day after day, meaning they're just going to need

supports for longer periods of time. Sometimes they're going to be more intensive supports, sometimes it's going to require more individualized prompting, just like you would teach children anything. I want to go back to what we said at the beginning, which is that with children with disabilities, we often have to individualize our instruction in terms of intensity, frequency, those kinds of things. And the same – we just have to keep thinking about behavior and social in the same way we think about them learning other types of skills.

Dawn: Yeah, yeah. Okay, so I'm going to take a minute and look through some of these questions that we have here. One of them is, "How specifically would you recommend teachers cultivate a supporting relationship with all kids?"

Mary Louise: Say that one more time? Sorry.

Dawn: Sure. "How specifically would you recommend teachers cultivate a supporting relationship with all kids?"

Mary Louise: Yeah, so I'm glad somebody brought that up, because, obviously, we think relationships is what it's all about. And I often challenge teachers to think about how they build relationships with all kids. So what are the strategies they use to build a caring classroom, a classroom where all children feel safe, where all children have relationships with their teachers, those kinds of things? And we know those strategies. But then you have to think about these children who don't respond in the same way, either because they have a disability or they have a problem behavior, and being more intentional about how you build relationships with those kids. Because I think we have some evidence that teachers talk to and respond to children who have challenging behaviors for sure differently, meaning that because they spend so much time dealing with the problem behavior, they often don't take the time to just step back and do the positive relationship-building things with those kids. So it's, again, just not about trying to do it the same way for all children.

Dawn: Yeah, so we have a question that's a little bit similar to that. It's that, "When we know what the behavior trigger is – for example, a father being incarcerated – how do we help our teacher deal with the daily misbehavior and screams for help?" And I think what you just said about relationships helps to address that a little bit.

Mary Louise: Yeah, so there's a couple of things I want to say about that. So I would say that something like a father being incarcerated or parents getting a divorce or a new baby, whatever those things are, I don't think those things trigger challenging behavior. I think they set children up to have challenging behavior. And what I mean by that is, you know, if a young child comes in on Monday and has just been to see his parent who is incarcerated over the weekend, he may be more quick to react and to engage in problem behavior. But there's still something at the moment that triggers it. He wants a toy from a kid, he's scared, he's tired, whatever. And I think that the way that we know what that is is, one, we have a good relationship with the family, where the family can – you know, I always say to teachers when you know a child's coming in the classroom with something going on at home that's going to set them up, you've kind of got to go into prevention mode, which is about giving the child more positive attention, decreasing demands on children. So if you know this is going to be a particularly hard day, lower your expectations. Give them a break when they need a break. Give them an extra hug during the day. Play with them a little bit longer. Yeah.

Dawn: Absolutely. You know, we are kind of – we're a little bit short on time, so with the other questions that we have, we have them, so we'll try to get to you guys through email or a follow-up document that we're going to have. We're going to send out a follow-up that summarizes what we talked about today and a lot of those strategies that we covered. And then we are recording the webinar, too, so hopefully that will be available to you as well. And I think next time we do this, we should certainly make some more time for questions. And we're going to have you guys fill out an evaluation form at the end, so, you know, if there is something different or something else that you would like out of this – maybe it's just more time for question and answer – then we will try and do that. So, Mary Louise, thank you so much.

Mary Louise: I'm so sorry that –

Tamarack: Don't worry about it at all. We're so glad you were able to join us and take time out of your busy schedule and share your expertise with us.

Mary Louise: Sure thing.

Dawn: So we'll say bye. You can turn off your webcam for now, and we're going to go over some resources that we want to share with you guys as well. All right, so let me get to the website here, because there are some things here we want to show you all. So there are a number of resources that we have available up on the ECLKC that fit for what we were talking about today. So if you go to the ECLKC and go to NCQTL's home page, we want to show you where the CSEFEL materials, the Center for Social Emotional Foundations in Early Learning, those materials are on the ECLKC. A lot of you might be familiar with those materials where they are on their website, but they're also on the ECLKC now, too, so we want to show you how to navigate to those. So you go to our page, you go to the house, and you clicked on Research-Based Curricula and Teaching Practices. And then if you scroll down to the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework and click under "Social & Emotional Development," here is where all the CSEFEL materials are on the ECLKC. So, Tam, could you tell them a little bit about the pyramid model and a few of these resources here?
Tamarack: Yeah, so we have the pyramid model for, you know, supporting social emotional competence in infants and young children. There are a lot of resources related to infants and toddlers, there's the Parents Interacting with Infants modules that you can access. For preschool, there are also modules there and visual supports that you can look at and share with teachers. There's information on creating a behavior support plan on the CSEFEL website as well, and there's also resources for parents and families.

Dawn: That's right. Okay, also on the ECLKC are the Head Start Center for Inclusion classroom visuals and supports. So some of the visual supports that we showed and talked about today in the webinar are actually available and ready to be printed out from the Head Start Center for Inclusion. So that also has its own website, but those materials have been integrated into the ECLKC as well, and here is where they are on there. And again, these are printable materials that you could use. So visual schedules are there –

Tamarack: So these are free?

Dawn: These are free.

Tamarack: Accessible to all – teachers, everyone, okay?

Dawn: Everyone. Some of the transition cards, those are there, all ready to be printed out, and they're ready for you to use those there.

Tamarack: So a lot of the visuals that Mary Louise shared with us today can be accessible here.

Dawn: They are. So then we also wanted to show you a place where the 15-minute in-service suites are. It's in the Engaging Interactions and Environments area, and we have a whole set of 15-minute inservice suites on behavior guidance right here, but a lot of the prevention strategies that Mary Louise shared, we also have suites for, so –

Tamarack: And these are primarily the Well-Organized Classrooms for setting up the environment, but then she also talked a lot about building relationships and fostering connections with families, and so that would be under the Social and Emotional Support column on the left. So all of these suites are ready for download – again, free, easily accessible, and are great if you're thinking of doing a training with teachers on any of these topics. They would be a great way to set teachers up to be preventative.

Dawn: Absolutely. And specifically for children with disabilities, in the Highly Individualized Teaching and Learning section – that's the roof of our house – there are some different strategies that you might use here in the Curriculum Modifications. So Tam is author primarily of a lot of those suites, and can you tell us a little bit about how you might use some of those in addition to what you might find in the foundation?

Tamarack: Oh, sure. So using curriculum modifications can be a really easy way to also be preventative or to use as part of a support plan. And so there are eight different general types, ranging from adult support to using child preferences to adapting materials. So all eight of these are accessible to you. There is an introduction, if you see the hand is pointing to that right now, and that would be sort of a quick general overview, if you feel like teachers already have a handle on how to use these modifications but just need a refresher. But they all are loaded with lots of examples, great learning activities, and take-home activities for the teachers.

Dawn: That's right. And then there's also TACSEI, Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention. It's something that also uses the pyramid model, so you'll see some things that are familiar there. And again, this is another resource. This is chock full of free resources and printouts and other things that can support your work around challenging behaviors. So we just wanted to make sure we shared all those with you all. Okay, so we will see you all again next month.

Tamarack: Yeah, February 20, 10 a.m. Central Time, 1 p.m. Eastern time. We hope to see you then, and have a wonderful month in the meantime. Take care.
[End video]